

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scenes

New York Theatre Openings This Week

Time Out For Ginger-Lyceum 11/26/52. Shephard Traube and Gordon Pollock present a new comedy by Roland Alexander. Starring Melvyn Douglas, directed by Traube, cast includes Polly Rowles, Conrad Janis, and Philip Loeb.

Digests of Current NY Theatre Reviews-more inside

National Theatre of Greece-Hellinger-11/19/52. Though not one of the NY daily drama critics admits understanding modern Greek, all joined in praise of superb ensemble acting as shown in group's production of Electra, starring Katina Paxinou. Kerr, Herald Tribune, sole reviewer who felt in first part of evening that star seemed to be recalling an earlier performance. Rest impressed with her acting ability, Watts, Post, noting that she was better in her native tongue than she is in English. Greek chorus and interesting music by Dimitri Mitropoulos. Atkinson, Times, who praised production as classic example of how Sophocles play should be presented, didn't think much of English blurbs in program. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, raved that no one who sees the present production will ever forget how star made him feel.

Madeleine Renaud-Jean Louis Barrault Company-Ziegfeld 11/11/52 Weekly drama critics joined daily reviewers in high praise and welcome to French company being presented in repertory by S. Hurok. Likewise they agreed that lack of knowledge of the language should prove no handicap to theatre goers enjoyment. Hobe, Variety, did admit that unless one understood language well, it might be a "so-what" evening; but he did recommend company for every serious theatre student. Gibbs, New Yorker, headlined his report "No French Spoken Here," though he did think Barrault and his group were excellent actors. Moore, Billboard, noted that it was difficult to hear every word in large theatre.

Daily reviewers expressed diverse views on group's second program Le Proces, Andre Gide and Jean Louis Barrault's adaption of the Kafka' novel. Atkinson, Times, admitted that only a reviewer with a fluent command of language could judge work fairly, but he could comment that script had turned serious, important novel into a theatre man's masquerade. Kerr, Herald Tribune, found script provided a striking, graphic, sometimes terrifying theatrical experience. Watts, Post, notes that no matter the language it is a difficult and absorbing play. Hawkins, WT&S, found play a shattering insight into how it feels to be a victim. McClain, Journal American, warned playgoers to come equipped with superb language talents and a very good idea of what the play is about.

Out of Town Tryouts

Trade paper reviewers are of different opinions concerning Broadway chances of I've Got Sixpence, John van Druten's new play which debuted in New Haven. Bone, Variety, predicts hit if author-director fixes loose final act. But Golly, Billboard, thinks van Druten can mark this off in package "Do Not Open-Not Even After Christmas." Main reason is that what started out to be a comedy, ends up as a near-sermon... See the Jaguar may be a hit thanks to acting efforts of Arthur Kennedy, notes Eck, Variety, after seeing Hartford tryout of N. Richard Nash's drama. Playwright's language is confusing, though characters themselves are strong.

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' Off Broadway '

NY Arena Guild planning spring season at Sutton Hotel. Irving Strouse has formed a service organization called "Arena Guild of America," to aid out of town arena groups...Blackfriar's Guild auditioning for The Angelic Doctor, new play by Brendan Larnen, due in mid-January...Columbia Theatre Associates presents To Charlie With Love, new play by press agent Peggy Phillips, Dec 10-13...Young Professional Players group starts 4th season presenting plays in NY hospitals and settlement houses...Gordon Reilly, new play by Charles Best, opening at Originals Only will have 2 complete companies, alternating performances...Light Opera Theatre opens 17th Season at Provincetown with week-end productions of Gilbert & Sullivan's Patience, Yeoman of Guard, and The Gondoliers. During the Christmas holidays Offenbach's Madame Favart will be presented...John Barley's Jungle Mission received a tryout at Henry St Playhouse.

' Vaudeville '

Chaz Chase, veteran pantomime star who munches cigars, etc., heads new Palace show. Others featured include Slim Timblin, June Astor, Bobby Day and Babs, Bob Gentry, Alfred and Lenore, Johnny Dee Tree and Gautier's Tallyho...Johnny Ray and Georgia Gibbs head Christmas stage show at Capitol... Toni Arden, Jack E. Leonard, Steve Condos and Jerry Brandow, and Art Mooney and orchestra head current Paramount bill... Skouras movie chain will soon announce, predicts Kilgallen, Journal American, that they will run theatre TV once weekly of Roxy vaude show...Eartha Kitt, New Faces, signed for 1953 at London Palladium...Danny Kaye will open two-a-day bill at Palace Jan 19...Radio City Music Hall revue praised by Smith, Billboard, who especially enjoyed Gloria Gilbert and clever props for male glee club's "Be A Clown" number...Jose, Variety, felt there was an overabundance of singing in current Roxy show. Performers Frances Langford, Maurice Rocco, Blackburn Twins with Marion Colby and Harmonica Rascals are all good enough performers, but they tend to get lost on massive stage.

' Yiddish Theatre '

Uncle Sam in Israel, Yiddish musical comedy now playing Public switches to English with same cast on Nov 27. Professor William Brickman, NYU, adapting the book, songs adapted by Bella Mysell...Yiddish version of Pirates of Penzance produced by Kadimah Group of Hadassah plays December and January in NYC & Brooklyn high schools...My Lucky Day, musical at Second Avenue, running popular priced matinees Sat.

' LA Theatre News '

I Am A Camera with Julie Harris opens at Biltmore for 2 weeks on Nov 24... 7 PM Monday curtain for Affairs of State at Carthay Circle Theatre upped box office take...Turnabout Theatre vacation ends Dec 26 when Elsa Lanchester will head a new revue...Farfel Follies, Yiddish English revue starring Myron Cohen, closed at Biltmore after 4 week run...Jose Greco ballet company opens 8 performance program at Wilshire Ebell Theatre...Dancers of Bali 8 performance program opening at Philharmonic Auditorium Nov 28...Santa Monica Theatre Guild performance of Taming of the Shrew, given at Morgan Theatre, highly rated by Von Blon, LA Times. Company gave rousing performance, read their lines with intelligence and had a definite feeling for the flow and meaning, she noted.

' Green Room Department '

.NY REPERTORY PROPOSED...Founding of a permanent NYC repertory company is now both a possibility and a necessity, S. Hurok told "Drama Desk" November meeting. Unless such a theatre is formed, NYC may some day find itself with no theatre at all. Non profit funds of business, city and state aid can easily be obtained at this time the producer explained. The most important factor in any repertory's success is that they own their theatre. Hurok offered his time, aid and office in getting a project going. Jean Louis Barrault spoke to the NY theatre reporters and editors on his group's current program.

COOL "CLIMATE"...New Moss Hart play, which folded after short run, was picked as current choice of Watts, Post, as the best American play of the year...Rosemary Harris and Penelope Munday, both of whom made their American debut in play, are probably in demand by most NY producers, predicts Morehouse, WT&S, but Equity alien restrictions will probably halt their NY employment for 6 months.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... Paris theatre season is even more dismal than London's, reports Hobson, Christian Science Monitor...Margaret Sullavan or Shirley Booth would win prize as best actress of season so far, notes Morehouse, WT&S...The drama critic who is dull is a nuisance to the theatre even when he praises, defines Brown, London Observer...High NY daily ad rates hurts legit, Variety survey finds.

MARLOWE & BARD...Reasons why Christopher Marlowe's plays have remained "source material" are historical, Burr, Playbill, explains. Marlowe's plays were not "improved" so they could be given during the Restoration. Later in the Romantic period Goethe's Faust was popular, while Marlowe's Faustus was almost forgotten. It is more than a distinct possibility that Shakespeare was influenced by Marlowe's early work.

PRODUCTION GOSSIP...Millionaire angel has just purchased leading role for his pretty wife in new comedy whose producers are selling stock to investors with would be talent in the family, hints Kilgallen, Journal American, without mentioning any names.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Shows that closed include Point of No Return, The Climate of Eden...NYC Theatre Company season at NYC Center cancelled for 1952-53 season because not enough money is on hand to cover costs...Billy Rose will turn over Ziegfeld Theatre to "Lively Arts Foundation" which is planning a full year program of the arts...City auction of Jane Cowl's goods netted \$1499...Shirley, New REPUBLIC, is new dean of Dramatic Workshop and Technical Institute. Barry Hyams, press agent, to produce The Wrastling and the Fall, new drama by Dorothy Monet...Two's Company NY debut postponed for 2 weeks or more, Paul Hartman replaced Hiram Sherman in musical's cast...Actors' Equity poll 54% in favor of continuing alien restrictions...Theatre Arts named Sigmund Spaeth record reviewer...Barrault-Renaud troupe honored by reception of Stage and Screen Foreign Correspondents Club...Theatre drawings by Milton Marx displayed at Museum of City of NY...Theatre Codes Committee nearing agreement on proposed changes allowing new theatre building...Association of Theatrical Press agents and Managers and League of New York Theatres meeting to consider "new blood clause" in contract...Bea Lillie was feted by her revue's stagehands on show's 50th performance, stagehands did satires of star's numbers.

' ANTA CRITICS' FORUM '

"Are The Critics' Undermining The Theatre?" was the topic of season's second ANTA forum sponsored by Greater NY Chapter of ANTA. Rice, Post, Thomson, Herald Tribune, Chapman, News, playwright Stanley Young and producer Lawrence Langer agreed that drama critics are no more undermining the theatre than any other economic or individual group.

Drama critics were chided for their lack of preparation when reviewing difficult works by Thomson. Music critic of Herald Tribune pointed out that his music colleagues attend rehearsals and study scripts of difficult works before they appraise them. By so doing they are able to judge more fairly. Drama critics, he fears, throw away some of their literary rights by such practices.

Costs, not critics, are the real danger, Young, author of recent Mr. Pickwick, explained. The English production of the same play seen on Broadway cost 1/3 less than the Broadway try. The war with the critics hasn't changed much during the centuries, Young reminded. The answer to the critics' power at any given time is always the same: the individual playgoer simply doesn't have to follow the judgement of the reviewers. The playwright would like to see the drama critics find out the "real" reasons behind the ever rising costs in theatre.

Though he didn't want to become sentimental over the depression days, Rice recalled that 18 years ago he could go to the theatre in NYC for 55¢ to \$1. Critics then were no more harsh than they are today, he pointed out. But because of the lower prices they just didn't have as much power. If the critics were actually undermining the theatre, they would be putting themselves out of jobs. The Post drama editor knows of no critic who is doing this, or would think of doing this.

If the Theatre Guild lasted 35 years, it was because it had avoided such discussions before, Langer quipped. Actually everyone is undermining the theatre, because everyone in the theatre, Theatre Guild included, is working selfishly. Until the theatre finds such unselfish leadership as it had under such people as Frank Gilmore of Equity, Langer stated, there is no solution to the theatre's ills.

Everyone who don't agree with his opinion of a given play is certainly undermining the theatre, Chapman noted.

' Late Reviews '

The Seven Year Itch- Fulton 11/20/52. All but McClain, Journal American, raved over George Axelrod's new comedy presented by Courtney Burr and Elliott Nugent. Though he admitted parts of it were very funny, McClain didn't think it was funny enough, considering the possibilities. Atkinson, Times, lead majority, billing it as an original and funny script. To m Ewell, Vanessa Brown, Neva Patterson and entire cast directed by Nugent were lauded. Kerr, Herald Tribune, also welcomed delightful addition to season. Chapman, News, voted for the grand and goofy comedy that will even relieve the dolors of a Stevenson voted. Mortimer, substiting for Coleman, Mirror, noted show was full of delightful dizziness. Hawkins, WT&S, filed a mild okay, noting that plot was based on single idea which it pursued relentlessly along a route that is half fantasy and half real. Watts, Post, also filed a mild verdict, commenting that much of the first night audience's laughter was well deserved, though he didn't share their enthusiasm. Play he feared was oddly lacking in charm.

